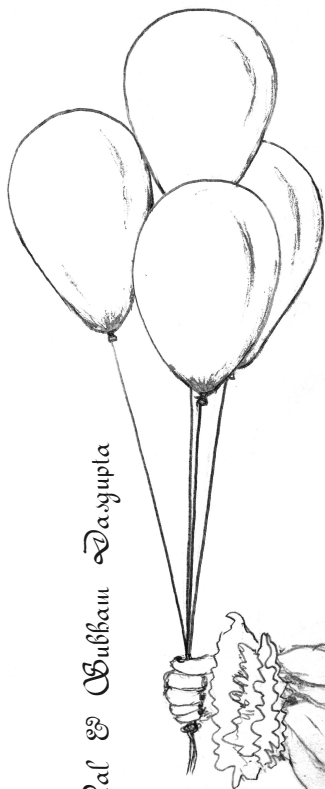


Edited by
William Dal & Subham Dasgupta



ਸ੍ਰੁਤਿ

Reminiscence



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Smriti

The reminiscence



Edited by
Uttam Pal & Subham Dasgupta

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About the cover: "Every so often, I could see the man's fist, where all the balloon strings converged, and I could see he had them securely twisted together and in a tight grip. Even so, I kept worrying that one of the strings would come unravelled and a single balloon would sail off up into that cloudy sky." —Kazuo Ishiguro (Never Let Me Go). Deep down in our hearts we are bound together by the memories of our Presi days. The bond holds us together, makes us special. Never snip it off...

Cover design: Uttam Pal



Attendance Register

Roll no.	Name	2008 Aug	Aug, 2009	Aug, 2010	Nov, 2011			
163	Agnivo Niyogi	P			P			
177	Uttam Pal	P			P			
180	Madhurima Dhara	P			P			
185	Subhasree Ray	P			P			
191	Neelanjana Chatterjee	P			a			
193	Krishnendu Sarkar	P	publication postponed	publication postponed again	P			
194	Sumitash Jana	P			P			
247	Sayan Mellick Chowdhury	P			P			
252	Rituparna Mandal	P			P			
254	Priyanka Kejriwal	P			a			
257	Sugata Roy	P			a			
260	Chandan Champa Baha Hembrem	P			a			
261	Sakshi Arora	a			a			
262	Debaleena Basu	P			P			
311	Subham Dasgupta	P			P			

Attendance Register

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দেখা

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Dissentience Unarmed...

three poems

The 11th Hour

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Foreword

Friendship is gentle and the thread is frail,
That binds the hearts; protect with care or off it will sail.
Only the weeds need no nourishing and grow anyway.
With the ceaseless flow of time memories fade away.
Not just another bunch of students graduated together,
We lived like a family and that's where we differ.
We are special but we are now scattered too far
And there is no chance of frequent encounter.

But, deep down in our heart we are still so near
That we can kindle our friendship and nurture.
In years to come, at times, we may spend some hours
To reflect our feelings in any form or other
And communicate them to be stitched together
And commemorate our bonding again and ever.

Uttam Pal

Kolkata, India
8 November, 2011

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Editorial

From Subham's Desk

"suffering from writer's block... nostalgia overtaking my brains..."

It feels strange... sitting here thousands of miles away from Kolkata, and scripting an editorial for something that was conceived almost 2 years back— the second edition of "Reminiscence". An endeavor that started as a tribute to the togetherness of our Presi batch, an endeavor to keep the strings attached. Reminiscence is not a reflection of our literary or artistic talents... it is a testimony of our friendship, our bondings; a tribute to the very existence of the Physiopals— that we are still there together in 2011, three whole years after passing out in 2008. So what if we have chosen diverse career paths around the world? Our hearts still remain in Kolkata, down the Presi lanes, the verandah, the LT, the histo lab, the canteen, Chiniz, Dilkhush. Today, I feel the bond and the needs of it stronger than ever. Some of us have been in constant touch, some aren't, but I'm sure that still today, everyone has the same affection for the others, and the same affection towards those days. Reminiscence bears the touch of this very affection. Many have contributed to the second

edition; many haven't... but I am sure those who haven't, will feature in the future editions (and I am optimistic about many more editions to come). I hope you all do enjoy reading the articles published in this edition— they are diverse in their subjects, but most of them have one thing in common— they are about realizing relationships, something which forms the foundation stone of the saga called “Physiopals”.

From Uttam's desk

First, I ask forgiveness of those impatient
For this unusually long deferment.
Lo! it's published now, let us celebrate!
And remember what Subham said.
Don't judge the articles only by merit
But the affection the authors put into it
For the Physiopals they hold so dear;
For, they wrote without being a writer!
Before we are old, there are years to go.
Who couldn't join in today,
I hope, shall drop by tomorrow.
And we shall remain together...
But now, let's not bother about the future
Just enjoy what your friends have to share!

Stony Brook/Kolkata
7 November, 2011 (GMT)

অন্ধকার রাত। হয়তো অমাবস্যা, নিস্তরকার
আওয়াজ কান পাতলেই শোনা যাবে। অন্যান্য
রাতের মত আজ তাঁদের আলো বিছানায় এসে
পড়ছে না। অনিমেষ শুয়ে ভাবছিল, সে কি পারবে? একমাস
ধরে যে প্রস্তুতি নিয়েছে, সে কি তা বিফল হয়ে যেতে দেবে?
মানসিক ভাবে নিজেকে সে প্রস্তুত করতে পারছে না।
অনেকবার ভেবেছে সে। কিন্তু সে নিজের কাছেই হেরে
গেছে।

তারার আলোয় যতটুকু পথ দেখা যাচ্ছে, তাতেই ভরসা করে
চলেছে অনিমেষ। যুবক অনিমেষ। সে কোথায় চলেছে? সে
দিক্‌দ্রান্ত।

পথের শেষে চলে এসেছে সে। সামনে তার গন্তব্য। এগিয়ে
চলল সে। প্রধান ফটক খোলা। এগিয়ে চলল অনিমেষ।
অবশেষে গন্তব্যে।

পাশ ফিরল অনিমেষ। ঘুম যেন ওর সাথে লুকোচুরি খেলছে,
উঠে রান্নাঘরে গেল। জল খেতে খেতে জানালার বাইরে
তাকিয়ে দেখতে পেল ওর বাবার পঁতা বেল গাছটাকে। কত
স্মৃতি বিজরিত সেই গাছটা। ও আবার ভাবল ও যা করতে
চলেছে, ঠিক করছে তো?

ধিরে ধিরে আম গাছের পাশে জলের পাইপ বেয়ে অনিমেষ
উঠে গেল দোতলার বারান্দায়। শ্মশানের শান্তি চারিদিকে।
সে বাইরে তাকালো। কোথাও একটা শেয়াল ডেকে উঠল।

আবার এসে শু'ল আনিমেষ। পাশে শুয়ে আছে ওর স্ত্রী রমিতা। এক স্বর্গীয় সুখ অনুভব করল ওর মুখটা দেখে। মনে পড়ে গেল গ্রামের মৃন্ময়ী প্রতিমার মুখ। মানসিক দ্বন্দ্ব আরেক ধাপ এগিয়ে গেল সাংসারিক অনিমেষ। অনুতাপের তনুভূতিকে কিছুটা হলেও ছাপিয়ে গেল দায়িত্বশীলতা।

উত্তর প্রান্তের দ্বিতীয় ঘরটায় রয়েছে তার আসল উদ্দেশ্য। ধীর গতিতে এগিয়ে চলল। এখন ভুলের কোনও অবকাশ নেই। তাকে সফল হতেই হবে। দরজার সামনে পৌঁছে দুবার কড়া নাড়ল অনিমেষ। মনে হল কেউ বিছানা ছেড়ে উঠল। দরজা খুলে গেল কিছুক্ষণ পর। সামনে দাড়িয়ে রয়েছে লাবণ্য। তার আসল উদ্দেশ্য। তার প্রতিশোধ।

অনিমেষ আবার উঠল। এবার বারান্দায় গিয়ে বসল। বেল গাছটাকে দেখল সে। এই গাছের নিচেই এমনই আরেক অমাবস্যার রাতে...তার বোন অসিতাকে নির্মম ভাবে হত্যা করেছিল জমিদার বাড়ীর প্রতাপ। তার চোখের সামনে। সেই দিনটাকে কিছুতেই মন থেকে মুছতে পারবে না অনিমেষ।

লাবণ্য। যার সাথে দুবছর ধরে সে প্রেমের নাটক করে গেছে। লাবণ্য। নিজের বোনের পরিনতির জন্য দায়ী লাবণ্য। প্রতাপের বিবাহিতা স্ত্রী লাবণ্য। কিন্তু যাকে মানসিক ভাবে কোনোদিনও গ্রহন করেনি লাবণ্য। যেদিন অসিতা সন্তানসম্ভবা হল, লোকলাজের ভয়ে অসিতাকে পৃথিবী থেকে সরিয়ে দিতে একটুও দ্বিধা করেনি প্রতাপ।

অনিমেষ কি লাবণ্যের সাথে শুধুই নাটক করেছিল? তাকে ভালবাসেনি? লাবণ্য মারা যাবার পরও কি তাকে ভোলাতে পেরেছিল অনিমেষ? তাই কি সে সন্তানহীন নয়? লাবণ্যের প্রতি তার ভালবাসা কি তাকে রমিতার সাথে সম্ভোগে লিপ্ত হতে বাধা দেয়নি? এভাবে আর কতদিন চলবে? রমিতার গর্ভে তবে কার সন্তান?

লাবণ্য ও অনিমেষ ছাদে গেল। তাদের মিলনের দিন আজ। পৃথিবীর সব বন্ধন ভেঙ্গে আজ তারা স্বাধীন হবে। ছাদের পূর্ব প্রান্তে, যেখান থেকে তার বাড়ীর বেলগাছ দেখা যায়, সেখান থেকেই সে ধাক্কা দিল লাবণ্যকে। নিমেষে শেষ হয়ে গেল সব।

তিরিশটা বছর কেটে গেছে। রমিতাকে শেষবার দেখল সে। শারীরিক ভাবে না হোক, হৃদয়ের অন্দরে স্থান দিয়েছিল সে রমিতাকে। বেল গাছটির দিকে এগিয়ে গেল ও। ঠিক যেখানে লুটিয়ে পড়েছিল অসিতা, সেখানেই গলায় ফাঁস দিল সে। রমিতার জন্য একটা চিঠি রেখে এসছে সে। কিন্তু রমিতা কি চিঠিটা পড়েছিল? সে কি ঘুম থেকে উঠেছিল?



—Agnivo Xiyogi

রক্ত আভায় রাঙা আকাশে
রাঙা মেঘ ভেসে চলে
শিশির ধোয়া সবুজ ঘাসে
নবীন আলোর মানিক জ্বলে
ফুলের গন্ধে মৃদু বাতাসে
প্রজাপতির ডানা মেলে
ঘুম ফিরে যায় ঘুমের দেশে
আঁধার ঘুচে সকাল আসে।

এই প্রভাতে আপন মনে
এগিয়ে চলি পিছন পানে—
হাত ছুয়ে যায় চপল বাতাস
চেউ তুলে সে ধানের ক্ষেতে
ব্যকুল হল উষার আকাশ
শুকতারা তার মিলিয়ে যেতে।

—Ultam Hal

মেয়েটি দলেই ছিল মিশে
তবু তার নিটোল চেয়ে দেখা
ছেলেটির তীব্র তুলির টানে
প্রতিমার মূর্তি দাঁড়ায় একা।

ছেলেটির হৃদপিণ্ড লাফায়
হঠাত্‌ই বালকে ওঠে স্নায়ু
তবে কি এই নারির প্রতিক্ষা
করেছে তার পৃথিবির আয়ু ?

দুজনের মধ্যে জাগে ঝড়
শেকড়ে তুমুল পড়ে টান,
দুজনের প্রাচীন ইতিহাস
হল সেই মুহুর্তে খানখান।

কে কোথায় ছিল গ্রহান্তরে
ছেলেটি নেহাত মফস্সলি।
তবে তার পদ্য উচ্চারনে
মেয়েটি অল্প কোতূহলী।

মেয়েটির সহজ মুখচ্ছবি
ছেলেটির কাঁপিয়ে গেল ভিত
ভাবেনি এমন অপ্রস্তুত
হবে তার বিপন্ন সংবিত

ওরা কি এ ওর ছোঁবে আঙুল

ওরা কি যাবে নদীর ঘাটে
ওরা কি আদৌ দেবে পা
জীবনের চিত্রিত চৌকাঠে

নাকি ফের ঘুরিয়ে নেবে মুখ?
অকারণ কুড়োবে সন্দেহ।
ওরা কি পার হবে আলগোছে
ছড়ানো এ ওর মৃতদেহ?

সে কথা আমার জানা নেই
কে করে বাতুল অনুমান
শুধু এই দেখার মুহূর্তকে
আমি আজ জানাচ্ছি সম্মান।

—Madhurima Bhara

পা

টনা বাজার, পশ্চিম মেদিনীপুর শহরের এক জনবহুল এলাকা। এই এলাকায় বহু লোকের বাস—আবার এরই এক প্রান্তে অবস্থিত বয়স্ক মানুষদের আবাসস্থল—রজনিতলা মেস্। এককথায় বলতে গেলে একটা বৃদ্ধাশ্রম। আমি এই বৃদ্ধাশ্রম নিয়ে কোনো তথ্য দিতে বা নিতে মোটেই আগ্রহী ছিলাম না। কিন্তু M.Sc. Part-II এর গুরুত্বপূর্ণ project করতে গিয়ে এই জায়গায় আসা। Project এর title বেশ জমকালো—“Geriatric Health & Nutrition” রজনিতলা মেস্ সেই অর্থে আমাদের অর্থাৎ student-দের কাছে প্রায় স্বর্গরাজ্যের সমান। যত বুড়োবুড়ি, যারা আমাদের “subject” —এই জায়গাতেই থাকে।

বৃদ্ধাশ্রম বলতে এতদিন যা বুঝতাম এই বাড়িটা তার থেকে উন্নত। বেশ বড় বড় building; separate rooms বৃদ্ধা ও বৃদ্ধাদের জন্যে; আলাদা dining hall, সাজানো administration building, একটি সুসজ্জিত drug de-addiction centre, বাচ্চাদের স্কুল, মুসলিম মেয়েদের স্কুল সবই আছে। মেস্ এর মালিক বড়ই যত্ন সহকারে আশ্রম সাজিয়ে রেখেছেন। বাচ্চা ও বৃদ্ধ, বিজ্ঞানের ভাষায় একই মানসিকতা সম্পন্ন দুটি age group কে এক স্থানে রাখার সার্বিক প্রচেষ্টা মালিক ভদ্রলোকের কম নয়। আমরা স্পষ্টতই এই সব নিয়ে আগ্রহী নয়। খাতা কলম, questionnaire, anthropometric rod, weighing machine নিয়ে survey করতে ready. Just একটা permission এর অপেক্ষা। আমাদের HOD administration এর সাথে কথা বলেছেন।

Internal Bleeding

বয়স্ক মানুষেরা সামনে ঘোরাঘুরি করছেন। আমাদের চোখে উনারা যেনো হেঁটে চলে বেড়ানো কিছু লোভোনিয় খাবার... শুধু পাতে পড়ার অপেক্ষা। মাঝে মাঝে এটা ভেবে খুব হাসি পাচ্ছিল। আমি আমার চিন্তাটা আমার partner-কে বলতে, ও বললো, “এমন survey করবো যে last sem-এ 50-তে 42 কেউ আটকাতে পারবে না।” যাই হোক শুরু হল survey. প্রায় ঝাঁপিয়ে পড়লাম, এটা এক দিনের কাজ, ফেলে রাখলে চলবে না। performance—ভীষণ important শব্দ career এর ক্ষেত্রে। First class first, first class second—এর উপরেই dependent. আবার ভাষনবাজীটাও চাই। lecturer-ship আর কী? সঙ্গে Ph.D... উফ্ Dr. উপাধি পেতে কারই বা খারাপ লাগে। সেই মানসিকতা ভীষণ ভাবে কাজের উদ্যমকে বাড়িয়ে দিল। Part-I এর 69% টা part-II তে 79% করতেই হবে, এই ভেবে প্রথমেই আমি যাকে বেছে নিলাম তাঁর নাম Ashoka Bhattacharya. পাশ থেকে বান্ধবী বলে উঠল আসতে করে... “বেশী family history জিজ্ঞাসা করিসনা, emotional হয়ে গেলে চাপ হবে।” Two hours সময়, ১০ টা subject complete করতে হবে। অনেক সাধনার ব্যাপার। তাও, কেউ পেতে গেলে কষ্ট তো করতেই হবে।

শুরু করলাম নাম, ধাম ইত্যাদি দিয়ে। Height, weight, pulse rate, health hazards সবই জিজ্ঞাসা করা হয়ে গেছে আমার বান্ধবীর। খাতাতেও উঠে গেছে সেই সব data. এবার শুধু একটু rapport build up করা, যাতে ভেতরের information গুলো বার করা যায়। এটা না হলে suggestion and conclusion part-টা ঠিক বানানো যাবে

না। লোকের মনে জায়গা করে নেওয়াটা আমার জন্মগত, তাই এই কাজটা আমারই ছিল। সহজসাধ্য procedure দিয়েই শুরু করলাম—

—“আপনাকে দেখতে বাড়ির লোক আসে?”

—“ই্যা।”

—“কে কে আসে?”

—“খোকারা, বোঁমারা, নাতি-নাতনী।”

—“রোজ আসে জ্যাঠিমা?”

—“না, পালা করে আসে।”

—“সপ্তাহে কদিন আসে?”

—“দুদিন, দুই খোকা একদিন করে আসে।”

এই তো গেল basic questions. এবার একটু deep-এ ঢুকতে হবে, তাই সতর্ক হলাম।

—“একটা personal প্রশ্ন আছে জ্যাঠিমা।”

—“ই্যা বলো না।”

—“আপনি এখানে কেমন আছেন? ভালো লাগে পরিবার ছাড়া?”

—“না মা। কারো কি ভালো লাগে? কিন্তু কিছু করার নেই জানো। ওরা আমাকে বাধ্য হয়ে রেখে গেছে এখানে। আমার শরীর খুব খারাপ। ভীষণ high pressure. বাড়িতে একা একা থাকতে হতো। ওরা সবাই বাইরে কাজ করতে যেতো। কখন কী হয়ে হয়ে যাবে কেউ জানতেই পারবে না। তাই, এখানে চলে এসছি। আমি ভালো আছি। খুব ভালো আছি। এখানে

সবাই খুব যত্ন নেয়। ছেলেরাও আসে যখন তখন। ওরা নিরুপায় ছিল...”

পাশের থেকে হঠাৎ বাস্কবী ঠেলা মারল, বলল, “এবার থামা... না হলে আর বাকী ৭ জন কে কী করে examine করবো?”

আমি কেমন যেন মোহিত হয়ে শুনছিলাম ভদ্রমহিলার কথা; ভাবছিলাম কী দুর্দান্ত প্রচেষ্টায় উনি নিজের আবেগ কে ঢাকার চেষ্টা করছেন। নিজের সন্তানদের মারাত্মক ত্রুটি ঢাকার চেষ্টা করছেন; “ওরা নিরুপায়” কানে বাজছে এই line-টা, ওরা নিরুপায়! বাইরের লোকেদের সামনে নিজের disputes গুলো লুকোনোর কী মর্মাস্তিক প্রয়াস! আমি অবাক দৃষ্টিতে উনার মুখের দিকে তাকিয়ে আছি আর ভাবছি... উনি মা। মাতৃত্ব কী সুন্দর ভাবে আবৃত করতে চাইছে নির্লজ্জ ছেলেদের দোষ। ভদ্রমহিলা আমাকে এইভাবে তাকাতে দেখে বলে উঠলেন, “সত্যি বলছি মা, ওদের কোনো দোষ নেই; ওরা সাধ্যমত চেষ্টা করেছিল কিন্তু...”

আমি জিজ্ঞাসা করলাম, “কী কী খেতে দেওয়া হয় এখানে?” পাশ থেকে Mrs. Debi Mukherjee বলে উঠলেন, “সকালে গরম একটা soup, সেটা গরম জলই বলতে পারো; দুপুরে ভাত, ডাল, সজী; রাতেও তাই, আর সন্ধ্য বা বিকেলে মুড়ি, ছোলা ভিজে আর অল্প তেল—তাও রোজ নয়। মাছ, মাংস, ডিম মাসে-দশে একদিন।”

—“ব্যাস্?”

—“ই্যা আর কী?”

—“আপনারা complain করেন না কেন?”

—“complain? হাসলেন অল্প এই জুটছে এই অনেক মা; নাহলে ভিক্ষে করতে হত।”

হঠাত্ Ashoka Bhattacharya অল্প ধমক দিলেন Debi Mukherjee-কে। আমি ব্যাপারটা বুঝতে পারলাম। Administration-এর চোখ রাঙানীর ভয়। মনে মনে হাসলাম। আবার HOD-এর কথাটাও একবার recapitulate করে নিলাম, “ফালতু ঝামেলায় যেও না। কাজ করে বেরিয়ে আসবে।”

যাই হোক, number পাবার আকাঙ্ক্ষাটা আমার detective মনটাকে দমিয়ে দিল। যদিও, আর কী কী তথ্য পেতাম জানি না। পেলো কেমনই বা লাগত! আমি কি এখনও মানুষ আছি? এখনও কি আমার মনে ঐ 65 years এর বয়স্কার জন্ম কোনো sympathy জাগে? নাকি আমি একটা robot, যে শুধু একটাই জিনিস বোঝে? career, যার steps গুলো হলো পড়াশুনো, preparation, examination, marks, accuracy, rank, etc. etc... উফ্, বুকের ভেতরে খুব কষ্ট হচ্ছিল... কানের ভেতরে কয়েকটা কথা বাজছিল... “ওরা নিরুপায়”, “ওদের কোনো দোষ নেই”, “আমি খুব ভালো আছি।” হঠাত্ করে realize করলাম... আমি একটা stoic হয়ে গেছি, the person highly indifferent both in pain and pleasure, যার life-এ কটা জিনিসই priority পায়—

career, money, high profile আর যার পরিণাম নিদারুণ অমানবিকতা; কারণ ততক্ষণে আমি অন্য subject-এর সঙ্গে interaction শুরু করে দিয়েছি; Mrs. Ashoka Bhattacharya-এর চশমার ফাঁকে দুটো জলভরা চোখ আমি দেখেও দেখছি না; তাঁর হৃদপিণ্ডের নিঃশব্দ রক্তক্ষরণ আমাকে একটুও প্রভাবিত করছে না। অমানুষ আমি... দুদিন পরে টাকা রোজগারের একটা যন্ত্র হয়ে যাব, তুকে পড়বো বড় লোকেদের জগতে... Dr. Subhoshree Roy... সত্যি কি দারুণ ব্যাপার? কী জানি!



—Subhasree Ray

[Author dedicated this story to her beloved physiopals]

2nd March, 1997 was the day. The memories of this day are still fresh in my mind as if it was yesterday. This is the day when I entered my school for the very first time. For the first few weeks it was like “how many days are left for the vacation?”, “When we’ll be leaving this place?” But the irony was, 8 years later none of us wanted to leave. The 8 years since the first day had been the most important period of my life, rather our lives, which taught us many things and most importantly gave us friends for a lifetime. We didn’t know how the school became a part of our lives. I was really lucky to have studied there. The memories of the school are still fresh in my mind.

Thanks to my 12th board marks I got chance in Presidency College. Here I met with the friend who later became famous as the ‘Physiopals’. Although I was not present in the college most of the times, still the bonding was, what to say, awesome. Even after we have left the college, the bonding that was among us grows day after day. I realized the fun of the college life when I left the college. While in college, it felt nothing much, but once out of it I realized the meaning. It is true it didn’t realize the value of something till it is lost.

This school or college has no meaning of its own, when you add the peoples around it, it becomes really

meaningful. For me the memories are not of the buildings or classrooms but the moments that are spent there. And I am lucky enough to have friends like you all who gave me many many such moments.

I thank God or the Destiny for giving me such wonderful friends.



—Krishnendu Sarkar

They are fools who believe that, "Man is the architect of his own fate."

They are daft who are under the impression that they can beat The Fates.

They are nitwits who imagine that can design their own thread of life.

Not long ago I too was ignorant, who believe that destiny could be manipulated...



I was new in Kolkata, as much at ease in the big bustling city, as a fish out of water. However, I was firmly convinced that if I studied well enough in the prestigious Presidency College, I would surely land up some plum job. And then, my parents would not have to slog as daily labourers back in my village. I dreamt of giving my parents and my younger brothers a better life.

This dream egged me on.

As a shy, poor boy I had very few friends in the city, except for Kalyan *da*.

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As a shy, poor boy I had very few friends in the city, except for Kalyan *da*.

Kalyan *da* hailed from a village neighbouring ours in Purulia district. He had been in Kolkata for quite some time and so knew his way about in the big city, so full of temptations and distractions. He was my '*dada*', philosopher and guide. I had known him in my childhood days and then had lost all contact with him. Infact, I did not even know that he was in the city. It was quite by accident that I met him in Kolkata, in a bus, on the way to college.

Since then Kalyan *da* became my mentor, and he was the only one whom I trusted and looked up to, to solve my problems.

One evening, while I was '*adda*'-ing with him in his tiny rented room, he told me something that was entirely unexpected of the extremely practical and level-headed Kalyan *da*.

As I narrated my monetary problems to him, just to elicit some sympathy from him, he took my palm in his hand and stared at it intently. Then he told me that he was an expert in palmistry. Curious as I was, I asked him to narrate what he had learnt from my palm. After as momentary silence, Kalyan *da* told me without any emotion in his voice that I had a chance of winning money, lots of money.

"You know Podu *da's* lottery shop in the corner of the street?", Kalyan *da* told me. "Buy the first 'Shree Durga lottery' ticket that Podu *da* sells tomorrow morning. You will win the lottery."

"Outrageous. Impossible", I screamed out, my voice drooling with wallops of sarcasm. Then I proceeded to inform him what illustrious men have stated about believing in destiny and all the associated mumbo-jumbo. Kalyan *da* did not say anything in protest. Instead when I had finished my tirade of comments and '*gyan*', he coldly told me, "I thought you needed the money so I told you. Don't buy the ticket if it is against your principles and beliefs. But I like people trusting me." There was a hint of steel in his voice.



Next day, in order to prove Kalyan *da* wrong I woke up early and went to Podu *da's* shop. In the early hours, there was only a solitary customer in the shop. I saw that he bought a host of lottery tickets, a 'Shree Durga lottery' being amongst them. I mentally mocked the man for his gullibility. I purchased a lottery ticket and then proceeded to patiently wait for the results to be declared the next week.



The following week when I went to the shop, the winning ticket number of 'Shree Durga lottery' was scribbled on the board. It was 2301200. I quickly checked my ticket number. It was 2301201! Kalyan *da* had been right! That customer who had bought the ticket that morning before me had won. If only if I had been a little early!

I ran off to Kalyan-da's room. Trembling, I collapsed at his feet. I asked for his forgiveness for mistrusting him. Kalyan *da* grimly smiled on with the joy of triumph dancing in his eyes. I humbly extended my hand and entreated him to tell me what he 'read'.

As he looked at my palm, his face grew dark. "Is something bad? Will someone die?" I timidly asked him.

He candidly told me that all the money that had I saved would be robbed from me next week.

I panicked. Indeed, I had saved a few thousands of rupees from the money that I earned by teaching kids. This money, I intended, to send back home for repairs of our house. As examinations were on in my college, there was no way I could go home before a month. What was I to do?

Then an idea struck me. I requested Kalyan *da* to keep my money with him until the “*phara*” passed. He flatly refused saying that he could not take the risk. After intense begging, I finally convinced him to safe-keep the money till I opened a bank account to deposit the money. Kalyan *da* was not too pleased with the deal. In fact, he told me that he might have to go back to his village the next week as his father was ill. However, I reasoned that the money would be safer with him than me. He gave the phone number of his house (they were quite well-to-do and could afford a phone), which I was to call if he had gone home. Happy with the arrangements, I came back with peace in my mind.



Early next week, I opened a bank account and went to Kalyan *da*'s house to collect the money. Podu *da* informed me that Kalyan *da* had gone to his village as his father was in death bed.

I went to a phone booth and dialed the number that Kalyan *da* had given me, more to inquire about his father than about my money. I was afraid of hearing of his father's demise.

—“Hello, is Kalyan *da* there?”

—“No he is not here.”

—“May I know who I am speaking to?”

—“I am his father, Kamalesh Maiti.”

I was stumped.

—“Oh, kaku... you... I mean... you have recovered? I mean Kalyan *da* told me that you were... I mean... sick...”

—“What? I am perfectly fine!”

—“But Kalyan-da said that you were ill, so he had gone back home. He has some money of mine, so I wanted it back...”

—“Look here, son. I don’t know who you are, but let me tell you that I ‘was’ Kalyan Maiti’s father. However, I have disowned him ever since he cheated villagers of few lakhs of rupees. I don’t understand how my son could become such a cheat. I have not seen or heard of him for five years now...”

I collapsed in the phone booth.



I have realised that it was in my destiny to lose the money in some way or the other. You see, you cannot trick The Fates.

Since that incident, I am no more a fool.

I am a firm believer of providence.

And a even firmer disbeliever of men...



—Sumitash Jana

Fools Rush Where Angels Fear to Tread

In this time of the year, when we are celebrating the biggest sporting extravaganza in a long time i.e. the Fifa Football world cup 2010, it is very easy to miss a advertisement doing the rounds on television in between the "Waka Waka" of Shakira's Hips and the "Waving flag". This ad shows two African kids playing football on a river bank and each trying to outplay the other, which shows the interest of football among kids in Africa in celebration of the world cup coming to Africa. Everything is quite normal till this part of the ad. But then the camera zooms out and the goal posts are shown which are shown to be two AK-47s, with the nozzles shoved into the ground. Both the guns belong to the kids. As said in the end of the ad the message is quite clear "most African kids still spend most of their childhood with guns in their hands" and it is because of the only one thing — "Diamonds".

Fortune magazine in a very famous interview got hold of a 18 year old diamond mine worker. The worker Sahr Amara is stooped low, knee-deep in a muddy river, in the fifth hour of his workday when the magazine got hold of him. The 18-year-old earns a stipend of only 7 cents, enough to buy himself a bowl of porridge to see him through the day. Yet he returns every morning to dig in the wilting heat on the edge of Koidu, a town in

eastern Sierra Leone, hunting for the one thing he says could transform his life: a diamond.

"If I find a big diamond, I can afford to go to school, I can learn, and then I can help my family and even my village," he says. So far the plan has proved elusive; "It's not easy," he says. "I think it depends on God".

If it really does depend on God then god seems to have turned his head away a long time ago from these people.

Koidu, whose diamonds have been mined for along time is thousands of miles away - and a galaxy removed - from the glittering displays in jewellery stores in New York, Tokyo and London. It is set in a country where the average man earns \$220 a year and dies at 39. In the dwellings along Koidu's dirt tracks, residents eat dinner by candlelight not because it is romantic but because there is no electricity in town, just as there are no telephone lines and little indoor plumbing.

The condition of these people and the civil war that resulted because of the diamonds have been well documented in the 2006 Hollywood movie "Blood Diamond" starring Leonardo di Caprio. The movie shows how the ruthless Revolutionary United Front

Diamond

Blood

takes control of Sierra Leone in the Sierra Leone civil war to take control of the Diamond trade in the late nineties and in the process loots, kidnaps and kills their own people wherever possible so that they get minimum resistance. The story line - a mixture of villainy and heroism - is classic Hollywood. But its roots are fact: In the 1990s rebels in Sierra Leone and Liberia financed their carnage from diamonds plucked out of the rivers and traded for arms. During a decade of war about 50,000 people were killed, and thousands had their hands hacked off by rebels. As told in the beginning of the movie the civil war resulted in the death of people, most of whom have never seen a diamond and do not know what it is used for. The film is a real eye opener and shows how the smuggled diamonds from these countries are in fact brought to India, where it is mixed with the non-smuggled diamonds and the diamond sharks all over the world work in tandem by providing only a part of the world wide diamond demand and storing the rest with themselves so that the value of diamonds always remain high and it was because of this that the civil war took place.

"Diamonds are worth nothing" says Mordechai Rapaport, whose Rapaport Group price list is the industry standard in diamond industry. "But when a person is killed to get that diamond, that's what makes

its priceless.”

The \$60-billion-a-year diamond industry, which claims to have built its growth on dreams of love has actually built its growth on the blood that has flowed for it.

So if you are wearing a diamond right now you should glance down at your diamond ring and think under what circumstances the gem was dug. Is it a diamond from proper deep-level mines run by well-ordered international corporations, or a smuggled “BLOOD DIAMOND” for which human slaughter has taken place?

*Diamond
Blood*



—Gayatri Kullick Bowdury

I have waged a war, I have a battle to win
Looks: strength outward; me weak within
Way long to go, no horizon seen
I have waged a war, I have a battle to win

I was not born a Warrior
Nor a king or a knight
Destiny chased me
Forced me to fight
Standing all alone
In the Witchcraft of Life
Combating each moment
For what? ...to survive?

Dreams have faded away
Memories are wounds.
No portion to heal
Time: I can't feel

How many Dawns will mock at me?
How many Dusks will pity?
Even now Justice is abashed of her deeds.
Farmer, admit it! You've sown wrong seeds.

With every indecisive moments that strife

And Death becomes worthier than Life
A slash of blade; a metallic pain
end of All; no foe, no kin
For I had waged a war... I have this battle to win.

—Rituparna Mandal

Dissentence Unarmed...

The high-pitched notes were hurting his ears
 Brooding he was, over stagnant fears...
 What was life's intention, Nature's plan?
 Was he to waste away, in the world's disdain?
 Struck by struggle, put to toil by abject existence
 Though, at times deceived by happiness...
 He pondered over how the world would be like
 If he and his likes were to be wiped out in one defiant strike
 Changed? Maybe not... but just maybe...
 Life would stir up and see,
 How she today precariously depends—
 On the few towering figures fate befriends...
 How the bulk feels unwanted; at bay—
 Almost useless; like an artist's humble clay...
 Ostensibly plain—but he realizes in a moment of truth—
 It is the powerful foundation of nature's creative pursuit
 Yes! Providence's chosen few, stand tall on *their* labour
 In unision, *they* result in a force like no other...
 But in isolation, he's one of the million specks of sand...
 He smiled—strange is the life of the *Common Man*!

—Debalena Basu

As the music reverberates in the air,
Quietly, softly thoughts come to their lair
As each breath lengthens into a sigh
I touch the ground, embrace the sky...

Lone in multitude, befriended by thought,
Each in golden letters wrought,
Cocooned in a world of dreamy haze
Trapping the stars in my endless gaze...

So many thoughts?! I wonder why...
Flooding my mind day and night...
The answer eludes me; it slips away—
Just out of reach; maybe another day...

Reason will triumph, but as the music flows in
I think and ponder, reflect and search within...
Busy life floats by unaffected; expressionless face...
As me and my thoughts, pause in the race...

—Debalena Basu

[This poem was written after reading about the gujrat riots... it acted as a cathartic for the emotional tumult I felt reading about the horrible incidents.]

I rush past the frenzied mob
Knowing, I am my family's sole hope—
I reach the place but a trifle too late
All's lost in this madness of violence and hate.

Shock, bewilderment, grief perplex my mind—
"Why was this to happen, so cruel, so unkind?"
Glimpses of my wife & daughter flash in a haze
Agony gives away to pain, pain to rage.

Communal thoughts seep inside me; it results in a frightening change
My aim's made, and I start off to exact my revenge.
I now surge forward with the senseless crowd, being one of them
No logic applies, no mercy, nothing but the language of mayhem.

One by one, I brutally extract the price of my family's blood
An evil energy grips me, enticing my darker side to evolve
By noon, the road is deserted and bodies litter the place
I know I have sinned, but harbor no regrets...

As I go round the bend, there's a boy, lost and helpless,

It's the enemy's son—I proceed to carry out my ways...
The boy comes up to me, and crying, asks for help
His innocent trust on me confuses my harsh self...

The orphaned child reminds me of my sweet nazneen...
Could it have been the same for the child?
Maybe he remembered his father on seeing me...
The boy's cries give me hope and set me free...

How ignorant could I be??
Only my side of the suffering did I see..
Life is too short to waste it away in mistrust and hate
After the calm, me and my boy being related by fate..
Are inseparable... and there's a longing both of us have felt—
That one day, everyone, like us, will be a part of world undivided.

—Debalena Basu

Raghav was startled by the sudden change in the hue of the surroundings. He looked up. The signal had changed from red. It shone brilliant green now and foretold the approach of a train. A train that would take him to a voyage out of the world, that had pained him a lot.

Green signal. As he looked at it, memories, 15 years old, flooded into his brains, much like an overflowing river. Sweet memories, that were unwelcome now, but he did not mind. All would be over within minutes.

He remembered how his father would take him to the station twice every week to “see” trains, how he would get excited when the signal would change from red to green; how he would try to run busily around the crowded platform, his father holding his hands fearfully, when a train approached; how he would cry when he was not allowed to board the train; and how his father would calm him, and promise him a ride next time. Oh, he used to be such a train-maniac. He *is* such a train-maniac.

And now, ironically, a train approaching would be the last thing he would see in the world.

A shrill horn jerked him out of his memories. Was it the

train? Oh! No! It was just a lorry passing through the road adjacent to the tracks. Then he still had time to live. How much? Maybe...3-4 mins? 3-4 mins before the darkness around him would be complete, devoid of lights from light posts, from distant houses, from the passing vehicles.

Suddenly his mother's face conjured up before him. The pained face on the day of the results of his entrance examination. His father had stopped talking to him because he had not qualified. His mother had stopped talking altogether because she could not face her husband's sorrow, as well as her son's failure. The *sorrow* of not being able to achieve the pride of being the father to a successful IITan... everyone around him knew of Mr. Mukherjee's dreams around his son... what would they say now? The *failure*, of not achieving what Raghav Mukherjee could *never* have achieved, because his potentials for achievement lay elsewhere... he knew that he wanted to be a *botanist* and not an engineer. For days, his parents would not talk to him, and also among themselves. All because of him. Of damned him! Simply because he had wanted to follow his own preferences! Crime!

The same had happened yesterday. He had taken his IIT entrance again, and failed again! His father was furious. "You have no hopes in life! Even a beggar's son

is more obedient! You want to be a damned 'plain' graduate? With no job prospects, no nothing? You don't respect our dreams around you. How I wish that you were not born! No child is better than a disobedient child like you." Dreams... his father had nurtured Utopian dreams without even consulting what his son preferred. Raghav was sad. Because he loved his parents and hated it when *they* were sad. So he'd better not see them sad in the future, ever. *He'd better not see them ever.*

Suddenly, there was a vibration on the tracks. He could distinctly hear the rattle of the train in the distance. The hum of the approaching train. He could see yonder brightening up. He continued walking in the opposite direction. He'd better not *face* death. He preferred it to be sudden, from behind.

At a distance, he could also hear the alarm of a level crossing. All would be over in seconds. The train was approaching.

Suddenly, Raghav felt strange. A few memories came flooding before his eyes, like the trailers of films. His first school day when his father held his hands, and looked at him from the gate till he disappeared into the building. His mother's joyful face, and smile when he got his first 100 in maths... in class 5. His visit to the

hills with his parents... their happy times together. His mother nursing him all night through, when he had high fever in class 9. His father defending him politely when his mother would scold him. His mother... *the vibration of the track intensified.*

He looked back to see his guardian of death approaching merrily.

One last time he had a look at the world around him. The world that gave him parents and friends. That gave him happiness, and sorrow. "Sorry, mom and dad", he had written on his suicide note, "I could not satisfy your expectations, and can't bear to look at the depression you are going through. I am not sad, because I know that I'll never be able to crack the IIT, but I can't go on like this, failing every year, followed by 2 whole weeks of silence. Thank you for being the parents that you were."

Before him, the tracks lightened up. He dared not look behind now. But he had a strange feeling. His mind went blank, as the vibration intensified. There was a loud roar of the whistle. Strange though it was, he could not look at the approaching train now, contrary to the fact that he always loved looking at it. The horn roared again. The level crossing alarm became more intensified..it went on like a mad dog. The rattle came

Our

11th

The

nearer. The green signal smiled mockingly at him. The earth beneath him was shaking like an earthquake. The green signal. The rattle. The alarm... all shouted together... he could feel his sensations grow numb. He stopped and stood still, waiting for the punch of Death.

For the last time, he thought of his mom.

And then, it was all over.



Three months ago on a Sunday:

Raghav was to go out with his friend, Vikram, for lunch. But the night before, Raghav's mom requested him, "Please stay back for lunch tomorrow. Tomorrow is your *dida's* birthday, she's supposed to come for lunch." Raghav harshly replied, "so, what can I do? Its your mother, mom, you enjoy! I enjoy more with my pals, than you, mom! Please don't interfere in my private life. I have promised Vicky that I would have lunch with him tomorrow, and I am going!" ...and stormed out of the room, actually enjoying his mom's tearful expression. "That should teach her!" ...he thought.

Next day, he waited hungrily for Vikram, at their

specified time. One hour gone, no Vikram. Two hours gone, still no Vikram. At the end of two hours, with a stomach aching with hunger, he saw Vikram approaching. "Sorry *yaar*," Vikram said, "but I was having lunch with my nephew! I meant to inform you, but had no balance! Anyways, I am leaving now, one of my school friends is waiting for me."

Vikram walked back home, humiliated and hungry. How he wished he had listened to his mother. On returning home, his mother understood what had happened, and gave him some leftover food from the lunch. Moms always do understand so much...



Raghav sat in the bed, having his morning tea. His parents were not still speaking to him. The same mute environment that had compelled him take the ultimate decision of death. The same mental condition, which he had been determined not to brave just last night. But he was still alive. Coward enough to be still facing the same ambiance.

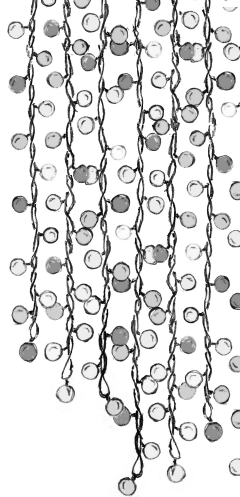
Only if his mom's face 3 months ago had not drifted into his numb memory at the face of death last night. Only if he had not made the jump, out of the tracks, out of the way of the train, out of death, just a second

before the train would crush him. COWARD!



—Subham Dasgupta

The End



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-- and--



(Exclusively from Subham...) UTTAM PAL who took all the efforts of reviving the magazine this time. Without him, the magazine would not have seen the light of the day.
#standingovation

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